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NATURE IN ORNAMENT--III.

BY LEWIS F. DAY.



IVEN all the wealth of suggestion in the world about us and the never ending variety of natural detail, the types that have sufficed for ancient and mediaeval ornament—and for that matter for our own ornament also—are comparatively speaking very few indeed. How largely the ornament of Egypt and Assyria is based upon the lotus, the papyrus and the palm. The vine, the ivy and the olive, the fir tree and the oak, together with the merest reminiscence of the acanthus went far to satisfy not only the Greeks, but their Roman and Renaissance imitators as well. Gothic art went farther afield and gathered into its posy a little of the rose, pomagranate and the Passion flower, the maple and the trefoil, but still only a comparatively small collection of plants agrowing and ablowing within sight of the village church.

The Gothic scollery of Hopper, of which an example is given in Fig. 13, is very remote indeed from the acanthus. The



FIG. 13.—TRANSITIONAL SCROLL, GERMAN. BY D. HOPFER.

spirit of the Renaissance was already in the air in the time of Hopper, and probably influenced his work. If it did so to any extent it shows how differently men can interpret the same notion; if it did not, it shows how from different directions they run to something of the same kind. There is nothing of the acanthus here—the foliation is more suggestive of the thistle—but yet there is in the design a familiar likeness to the Classic and Renaissance types.

To show how far one may travel from nature and still be very ornamental, Fig. 14 is a panel rendering of the *fleur de lis*



FIG. 14.—FLEUR-DE LUCE. TREATMENT OF IRIS BY WALTER CRANE.

by my friend Walter Crane, a master of the craft of design, who possesses a delightful way of turning nature to account in ornament of his own. Owen Jones, who laid it down as an axiom that the recurrence of a natural type was by so much a degra-



FIG. 15.—BOOK COVER. DESIGNED BY OWEN JONES.



FIG. 16.—SUNFLOWERS AND ROSES WALL-PAPER. BY B. J. TALBERT.



FIG. 17.—CARVED CABINET DOOR FROM CAIRO, S. K. M.

dation of design, cannot do without foliation and growth more or less according to nature. This is very plainly shown in a typical example of his work shown in Fig. 15, which represents a bookcover design. He has the strictest views as to the laws on which ornament should grow; and his theory led him in practice to something always more or less suggestive of nature—because the logical way in which he went to work was indeed the very way of nature.

The history of decorative art, in all times, ranges from the construction of mere transcriptions of nature to the most intentionally conventionalized and elaborated ornament. Fig. 16 represents a wall-paper pattern of sunflowers and roses by B. J. Talbert, designed a few years back when the sunflower came into fashion—not merely because of the whimsical folly of a few so-called aesthets, but because its handsome and imposing head was such an unmistakable ornamental feature. Foliage and flower alike lend themselves to, and indeed almost compel a broad and simple treatment, whilst the character of the plant is so well defined that it is difficult by any kind of rendering, or any degree of conventionality of expression to eliminate it.



FIG. 18.—ITALIAN RENDERINGS OF THE IRIS. PAINTING AND DAMASCENING.

It was never in danger of being reduced to a mere abstraction of a flower that might have been suggested equally by one of half a dozen different natural types.

From so simple a treatment of the natural form as that just mentioned, ornament ranges to floral forms with whose precise nature we are unfamiliar, so severe is the conventionalization. It is clear that the carver of the carved cabinet door from Cairo (Fig. 17), had in his mind some natural leaf, but what that leaf was is not so certain.

One of the charms of the early Gothic is that, conventionalized as it is, and in the main of one type, there is always a chance of our coming upon some touch of nature, which brings the workman nearer to us. But in many cases it is tolerably clear that no particular leaf is intended, but only foliation—no particular plant, but growth. The plant in such a case undergoes complete transformation, as we see in Fig. 18, showing an Indian rendering of the Iris.

(To be continued.)